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FEDERAL JURY CONVICTS ANCHORAGE MAN IN THE FIRST SEX TRAFFICKING TRIAL IN THE DISTRICT OF ALASKA

WASHINGTON – A federal jury in Anchorage, Alaska, returned guilty verdicts late yesterday on 28 counts charging Don Arthur Webster Jr., 51, also known as “Jerry Starr,” with sex trafficking of minors and adults, as well as drug trafficking offenses, Assistant Attorney General Alice S. Fisher of the Criminal Division and U.S. Attorney Nelson P. Cohen of the District of Alaska announced today.

This case is the first sex trafficking trial in the District of Alaska. Webster was tried before Senior U.S. District Court Judge H. Russel Holland on charges arising from Webster’s operation of sham escort businesses that were fronts for prostitution in the Anchorage area. After hearing testimony for 11 days, the jury found Webster guilty on two counts of sex trafficking of a minor to engage in a commercial sex act; nine counts of sex trafficking of adults by force, fraud, or coercion; two counts of distributing crack cocaine to a pregnant woman; four counts of distributing crack cocaine to individuals under the age of 21; and eight counts of distributing crack cocaine. Webster was also convicted of one count of possessing crack cocaine with intent to distribute it, one count of maintaining a premises for the purpose of manufacturing and distributing crack cocaine, and one count of manufacturing crack cocaine.

The evidence at trial established that Webster would target women who were homeless, in low-paying jobs, or runaways and invite them to work for his purported “escort services”- “Foxy Roxies,” “Sunshine Girls,” “American Beauties,” “Kotton Kandy,” “Tiffani’s,” “Tickle Your Fancy,” and “Lickety Split”- businesses where an individual would supposedly pay for another person’s “time and company.” In fact, these escort services were fronts for Webster’s illegal prostitution business. In exchange for money from clients who called the escort services’ phone lines, Webster would provide adult women and underage girls to engage in sex acts. The prostitution business operated on an “out call” basis, meaning that the females would meet the caller at his residence or at a hotel paid for by the caller. The caller would pay a fixed hourly rate plus a transportation fee to have sex with the female who would meet him, but would pay additional money in exchange for sex acts or drugs which Webster provided.

The youngest victim testified that she was 13 when she began engaging in commercial sex acts for Webster and that she continued to do so for two years. The other minor who was similarly victimized was 17 years old.

The evidence also established that the women were required to give Webster all of the money they earned. When they returned from a “date,” they would receive an “issue,” which was approximately a gram of crack cocaine. In their testimony, the victims described going on up to ten dates per day, every day, with no days off. They would work up to five days in a row without sleeping. All of the victims testified that they were addicted to crack cocaine when they were involved with the prostitution business.

The women all lived in houses in the Anchorage area that Webster paid for and he imposed rules on them during their residence. They could not have any visitors, nor talk to anyone outside of the “family.” They could not purchase anything without his knowledge, and had to provide receipts if they did. They also could not talk to men unless they were getting paid, and they could not obtain drugs from anyone besides him. The women were given an alias to use in connection with the so-called escort services. They called the defendant “Daddy” or “Jerry.” Many of them never knew his real name.

According to witnesses, Webster would physically assault and abuse the women in various ways. For example, the victims testified that Webster would often assault one woman in front of the others in order to make an example of her. Victims described being repeatedly choked, punched, slapped, bound, and strip-searched by Webster or someone acting at his direction. He also threatened to pour boiling water on one victim while another was in the room. In another incident, when one victim left the house, Webster found her and dragged her back by her hair. Additionally, two victims described being locked in "the box," a small crawl space or closet, as punishment for disrespecting him. Furthermore, several victims described a "family" meeting where Webster dragged one young woman into a room, out of the other victims' sight. The witnesses said they could hear the sounds of the resulting beating, and described how that woman emerged bruised and bloody, with chunks of her hair missing. One victim also described Webster raping her, and several others testified that Webster insisted on having sex with them.

Webster, who was detained prior to trial, will be sentenced on April 25, 2008. He faces a maximum statutory sentence of up to life in prison and a fine of \$250,000.

The case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Audrey Renschen and Kimberley Sayers-Fay of the U.S. Attorney's Office in Anchorage, Alaska, and Trial Attorney Alexandra Gelber of the Child Exploitation and Obscenity Section in the Department's Criminal Division. The investigation was conducted by the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Vice Unit of the Anchorage Police Department, in conjunction with the Alaska Human Trafficking Task Force.

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